

## ‘Patrick Braggs’

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Stepped out of the lift. Noticed a new paper on the colony notice board. Few hand written words in red bold letters. ‘Going out of town for a month. Shall return as soon as the work gets over. Very very sorry for the inconvenience’. Three line message for committee members and the residents. Signature - ‘Patrick Braggs’. Oh! This is our Patrick?. Never saw his hand writing in last thirty five years and never knew his surname.

Patrick! Self declared ‘Cleanliness Director’ of Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, (TIFR) colony and office, the premier research institute of India located in South Mumbai. Working since the days of late Dr. Homi J. Bhabha (1909-1966). Black or blue short, most of the time below waistline, rest bare body, water filled bucket in one hand and mop or broom in the other. Half sleeve T-shirt, only when resting or going out. Always in a great hurry. Machine gun of words set in the mouth and always on, no matter if there are listeners around or not. Day begins much before dawn. Sweeping the corridors, stairways and lifts of a ten story building, pulling the trolley loaded with garbage drums to the scrap yard located near sea-shore is the first task. All alone if the colleagues do not turn up in time. Then trip to canteen. Hot tea cup with a topping of small Amul butter cake. The molten butter would form a transparent liquid floating on top. Then a piece of bun bread would get soaked in it to make a delicious dish.

After this unusual light breakfast, work in the office would begin. Department, ‘Cosmetic Maintenance – nature of work Zadupocha’. The term ‘work efficiency’ could best be defined using his work as a yardstick. No matter if any one appreciates or not, whether the work gets converted into promotions or awards and rewards. Always work-o-holick. Cleaning of lift cars in the evening, after office hours. Main doors, lift floors must be spotless clean. Brass handles and brass buttons must be shiny like a mirror. No matter how many bottles of ‘brasso’ liquid and heaps of cotton waste would be used up. Immediate response upon comment or remark, “Do you know Sir? This is the place where Dr. Bhabha patted me on the back and said, ‘Patrick! These lifts should always be glittering even when I am not there.’ He went away and never returned. Some say his body is not found yet. If he really returns and enters the lift, shouldn’t these be shining as he wanted?” This was the main driving force in all his acts. He would never allow anyone to clean up the lift cars till he was in the service.

Late in the evening and again in the service of the colony residents. Just across the road. Cleaning and washing the cars with one eye on the children playing around. He would then take out a huge hose from the common bathroom to wash and mop the huge floor in the colonnade area. Even in the days of heavy water cuts and shortages. No one would dare to stop or scold him or object. No talk and gossips during this work. One would wonder about his lunch, but dinner used to be quite heavy. Two Tiffin, a piece of a fish or mutton mandatory and of course a small flat bottle for booze. With couple of pegs in stomach, he would relax and forget all the labor of the day and the stingy and pungent garbage smell. After wonderful meals he would settle on stairs or in verandah with a tobacco or pan. If one is strolling in the corridors after dinner, he would follow with his radio station on. You have to just listen to him and give a push if he begins to detune or

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distract. ‘Who has gone abroad or who has returned? how he gave me foreign shirt and a bottle of ‘English’ liquor? Who has recently bought a flat or house and how much did he pay? What is the current market value and rent? And how much rent is he getting? Whose daughter is roaming around with her lover and how is it that her father doesn’t know?’ Topics and the subjects would change depending on his mood and also on the amount of booze he had and its effect. If no one is around, then he would keep talking to himself, or sing his favorite songs loudly. Often he would end up in big laughter episodes before going to bed in the basement. Next moment he would begin to snore loudly. In summer, he would set his bed in the terrace. All his belongings in a small tin trunk and kept in the basement.

This schedule is on for last fifty years. Patrick came to Mumbai when he was around twenty years old. He learnt to speak Marathi and Hindi with expertise in the abuses and strong slangs. He would communicate fluently with all the cleaners, colleagues and the maids around. Always ready to help the residents moving in or leaving the campus. If invited for his help in any function in the basement or flat, he would work like a family member with all kind of labor and the work involved. It would then be his responsibility than that of the host.

In one monsoon, winds were blowing heavily and I forgot to bolt the kitchen door. It slammed so heavily, that full size glass window broke and drawing room was full with shattered glass pieces. He was working in the corridors and came running after listening the big bang. Somehow I managed to reach the door without hurting my feet. He saw the scene and said, ‘This happens at least once in every flat. People don’t learn a lesson till then. Don’t worry. All of you go and sit on the bed and leave the door open. I am coming with broom and the mop’. I followed his advice and within few minutes he cleaned up the floor thoroughly. No one would have believed about the accident but for the empty door frame with no glass. This was a routine for him and he was always contended with whatever you offer him. Never argued for the wages. If colleagues would talk about strike or ‘no work’, or ‘go slow’ tactics, then he would shout at them, ‘First do your work honestly and properly. Then let me see how we don’t get a proper pay’. No one would ever argue against his logic.

Every year, Patrick would participate and enjoy two important events in the colony viz. the Independence Day and the Republic Day. He would be after the Chairman in the office for all details – whether the flag pole is coated with white oil paint or not? Who has the tricolor flag? Is it ironed properly? What about the mock trial taken prior to the day of celebrations? He would pester and get all the details worked out to his satisfaction. Soon after flag hoisting and mass singing of ‘The Anthem’, he would disappear to return only in the evening. In this ceremony of removing the flag, often he would be alone. He would remove the flag ceremonially and hand it over to the concerned resident.

‘Funny Patrick Uncle’! This is how he is known to children in the colony. He would see his own childhood in their company and would never scold or scare them. If someone is found throwing paper flag on floor, then he would go and ask the kid to pick it up and give due respect. If someone is injured he would rush to pick the kid up, provide with the

first aid and all help needed. If serious, he would take the kid to Doctor even before the concerned parents would know. Batches of children and research scholars have grown and left colony under the kind and loving supervision of Patrick uncle. They never forget him. Whenever they visit campus, they do inquire and meet him with nice gifts. He is on their blogs and they do share 'Jokes of Patrick Uncle' on social communication sites.

Now, Patrick has crossed seventy-one and moving forward with the same vigor. He is enjoying his pension for last eleven years and hopes to continue till the century of his life. Even after his retirement, he lives in the same basement and not prepared to leave. Recently he had to undergo major surgery at Jaslok hospital for the replacement of his hip bones. He was admitted for two weeks and became popular in the ward. He was advised one month rest. But he quarreled with the doctors and argued that 'Lot of work is pending in the colony and these new recruits are good for nothing. So, I must go'. Finally, he persuaded doctors and came out only to get on to his work. He never gets tired. His ninety years old mother and seventy years old sister are in Kerala in an old age home. Mother passed away recently and he had now gone to meet his sister. He has also a small flat in Badlapur, suburb of Mumbai, some fifty km. on Mumbai Pune rail road. He goes there once a month, early in the morning, cleans up his own house and returns to colaba well before evening. New residents and committee members do not entertain him. They advise him to go back and rest. But he is not prepared to leave. What can he do? He is still bound to the promise he has made to Dr. Bhabha long ago.

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